PAPER PRESENTED FER CENMEP CONFERECE

"POLITICIAN ONLINE:

ANALYSES OF ESTOIAN CANDIDATES'

USE OF WEBSITES

IN THE 2009 EUROPEAN PARLIAMET ELECTION CAMPAIGN"

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18-19 December, 2009, Groningen

ABSTRACT

This article examines the ways how Estonian candidates were implementing Web 2.0 applications during the European Parliament elections in June 2009. The study considers effectiveness of the candidates' websites presentation. Several web-specific features, the ability to use multimedia and interactivity are taken into consideration. The paper also looks at how the phenomenon of personalisation of politicians' reflects in the Estonian web-campaign environment. Conclusions are drawn as to whether political web pages offer opportunities for implementing a deliberative policy, as Web 2.0 applications give opportunities to involve people to the debate and increase participation.

The analyses show that in Estonia political web sites do not offer citizens many possibilities for participation. Even if candidates have blogs and are present on social networking platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, they tend to use these applications only for marketing purposes and not for implementing deliberative politics. It could also be argued that the personal input from the side of the candidates to the Internet campaigning is low and most candidates do not offer that much interactivity via the websites.

Key words: online campaigning, political websites, Web 2.0, deliberation, Estonia

1. INTRODUCTION

The World Wide Web has given citizens the opportunity to access government activities and it also gives voters new insight into political campaigns. The old model of political communication, where mass media had the central role, is gradually being replaced with a new one, which via the Internet offers possibilities for the direct dialogue between politicians and citizens.

The Internet has increasingly become an environment where a political campaigns take place. 2008 general elections in the USA demonstrated how Web 2.0 and social media were used in an political campaign in order to involve a wider range of voters in the election process.

Websites provide in times of increased *mediatisation* and *personalisation* excellent opportunities for increasing the level of familiarity and improving the reputation of a person or organisation. Via personal websites and blogs target groups can be reached easily, directly, cheaply and quickly. At the same time, the information provided via political websites is unfiltered and this feature is particularly important to those who want to bypass the gatekeeper function of traditional mass media.

One of the main points is that the Web 2.0 applications offers new possibilities for political parties to involve citizens into the political decision making practice. Some theorist consider this phenomenon an option to implement a deliberative democracy and to regain legitmatisation (Gibson and Word, 2000). On the other hand, many recent studies show, that these opportunities are not effectively used either by citizens or by politicians.

Most research so far has focused on the effect on the Internet use on political engagement and political information, less studies is focusing on how political actors use the web.

This paper therefore makes a significant contribution by analysing the online engagement of political parties.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Web 2.0 and social media in the context of political campaigns

Mastering good communication skills have been in interest of politicians for a long time. For modern leaders the more frequent use of innovative communication channels have been the secret weapons to win the war. If USA politics is taken into consideration in the last century the radio was very important for Franklin D. Roosevelt and the television for John F. Kennedy, but for president Barack Obama it tends to have been Web 2.0 and social media.

The birth of the World Wide Web in 1993 brought considerable innovations to the political campaigning techniques.

Gobbe brigns out what wikis, web forums or blogs are all dealing in the same environment: Internet and the web. Every net-connected computer is a node. Every node communicates with few (or many) nodes producing that way new contents. That way communication is no longer as it was tradition in the era of broadcast media, when content was offered from one to many via TV station, printed book and any other form of so called old media, which corresponds to push media model (Gobbe, 2006: 15). With WEB 1.0 the old or broadcasting media model was changed with what could be called pull-media or narrow casting model. It means, that the content in the web environment is created by few and read, or pulled by few readers. Obama has turned Web 2.0 into a major platform for his presidential campaign employing social media, from YouTube savvy to Flicker and Twitter and many other social networking sistes. No doubt, by doing so Obama has

brought the so called grassroots campaigning into the digital age and in order to win elections many political campaigners have employed Obama's techniques in many countries.

The majority of the research in this field has mostly been focused on how the Internet affects the democratic societies (Davis, 1999; Bimber, 1998). At the same time, the e-campaigning effects on offline election process has been studied (Xenos and Foor, 2005). Some scholars (Bentivegna, 2002; Gibson and Ward, 2000) consider e-campaigning as offering opportunities to revitalize the rational ideals of democracy, what some communication theorists have thought to be lost in present-day political communication (Blumer and Gurevitch, 2001). However, there are those who tend to argue that the WWW is itself shaped by real world characteristics of society, for example common campaign strategies, established power and resource relations, or traditional cultural values (Foot and Schneider, 2006). During the electoral period these characteristics are thought to be replicated to on the web pages of the politicians and parties and adopted to the new media environment. Supporters of these viewpoint believe, in other words, that e-campaigning does not bring any revolutionary innovation for the modern democracy, but instead, the typical current real worlds patterns of political campaigning will be adopted to web environment (Margolis and Resnick, 2000).

2.2 Personalization and the Web

Studies show that the overall mediated visibility is a growing trend, while politicians' leadership qualities is notable in a lesser extent. The phenomenon of so called personalization, which involves showing the 'human' side of leaders and presenting his or her personal life facts to the public is an increasingly notable trend during the latter 20 years in most societies (Langer, 2007).

Historically the social structure have been of the main factor to determine the attitudes and behaviour of many citizens. According to Blondel and Thiebault (2009) in recent years changes in social structure have diminished the role played by class and religion and simultaneously the importance of personality in political leadership has increased.

Personalization in politics is explained in literature as the phenomena, which in recent decades has characterized all democratic systems, both presidential and the major parliamentary systems and means that focus is on the leader instead of the political party (McAllister, 2007).

Personalization has become increasingly important phenomena in successful organizational and corporate communication and more and more agencies and consultants offer personality PR services for the politicians (Nessmann, 2009).

Personalization of the leaders is not a new phenomenon. The various ways in which influential individuals from the worlds of politics, religion, art or science present themselves go back to the very dawn of humanity. In an analysis of the history of personalization techniques Nessmann (2000; 2004) finds out that over the last 2000 years famous and influential historical personalities have used methods which would be considered nowadays as professional personality PR methods. There could be brought forward such common practices as the use of 'fashionable' clothing, hair styles, make up and accessories, 'showing off' their personal life style, surrounding themselves with VIPs, having coins minted with their likeness on them, creating their family's own coat of arms, having their portraits painted by greatest masters of the day, staging important social events, making public appearances of any sort, publishing documents, manifestos, books, memories, autobiographies etc. What makes the difference compared to the past is that in present the use of such instruments is characterized by strategic planning and systematic management.

Personalization became especially evident phenomena in the second half of the 20th century, when television completely changed the political campaign's strategy. This process is known in the

social science as mediatization of the institutions and politics (Hjarvard, 2008; Schultz, 2004; Thompson, 1995). The first to speak of the mediatization of political life was a Swedish media researcher Kent Asp, who explained the term as a process whereby "a political sytem to a high degree is influenced by and adjusted to the demands of the mass media in their coverage of politicis" (Asp, 1986, cited in Hjarvard, 2008: 106). Mediatization is described as process of high modernity in which the media from one side emerge as an "independent institution with a logic of its own" and all the social institutions have to adopt themselves to the so called "logic of the media" (Hjarvad, 2008:105). At the same time, media become inseparable of other institutional activities related to politics, work, family, and religion as most of the activities of those institutions are performed via interactive or mass media (ibid.). For Hjarvard the concept 'mediatization' points to a number of different aspects of the interaction between media and society (Hjarvad, 2008:113). Mazzoleni and Schults (1999) state that "mediatized politics is politicis that has lost its autonomy and has become dependent on its central functions on mass media, and is continuously shaped by interactions with mass media" (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999: 249).

Considering the ideas of those who argue that e-campaigns adopt real life campaign logic, the phenomena of *mediatisation* could be implemented in the internet environment and e-politics.

Personalisation of politics has got a significant part in the mass media driven politics (Toode, 2009). Louw explains that television has helped to built the mass consent for liberal capitalism by deploying the *'ideology of commonness'* and *celebrating 'averageness'* within a framework what Louw calls *new they genre of televisualized politics.* In this case politicians as television celebrities are crafted as tools to entertain, titillate, distract and steer the mass audience (Louw, 2005:180).

A significant part of television driven politics has the consequence that political leaders are trained to be political celebrities who must be able to perform in front of TV cameras to project the

charismatic image and of being simultaneously *'ordinary'* but also *'leader'*. As with other celebrities, celebrity politicians are special for being famous, not for being superior. As Louw puts it: "Politicians now attempt to portray themselves as 'Mr. Everyman' or 'Ms. Everywoman' (ibid: 180). This tendency involves also personalization, as the personal life and 'human' side of the leaders has been brought to public. This phenomena could easily also be adopted to political web sites and blogs of politicians, where the personal and "human" side of the politician is often stressed.

In the context of Personality Public Relation the new media (blogs, social networks etc) offers new and challenging opportunities for political parties, politicians and campaigners. The Internet offers many possibilities for increasing the level of familiarity and improve the reputation of a person or organization. Nessmann argues that the internet, and specially Web 2.0 has become a "compulsory" element of person-centred image and reputation building techniques. Simultaneously, the number of "e-reputation consultants" is growing fast all over Europe (Nessmann, 2009: 354).

The possibilities of WEB 1.0 might be considered passive personality PR strategy, as website visitors can only read or download the information which is published and available in the internet. Nessmann (2009) thinks that active web-based personality PR strategies are much more important. These involve people actively drawing attention to themselves, e.g. posting information on themselves and/or on specific topics in the internet and networking with the help of numerous WEB 2.0 applications.

The internet, in general, offers outstanding excellent opportunities for the classical PR function of creating and strengthen relations. Nessmann brings out the most important online instruments in personality PR:

- setting up a personal website and/or blog

- participating social or business networks (such as myspace.com, facebook.com, xing.com, linkedin, twitter, et al.)
- photo and video sharing communities (for example flickr,com, youtube.com)
- social bookmarking where personal favourites can be stored centrally (delicious.com); and
- meta-networks which link all personal profiles (such as calimID.com, FindMeOn.com. etc) (Nessmann, 2009: 355).

In times of increasing mediatization and personalization, these are weblogs or blogs which provide excellent opportunities for increasing the level of familiarity and improving the reputation of the person.

The advantages of the blog are that they can address target groups easily, cheaply, quickly, directly and authentically in a form of dialogue with very broad coverage and without being filtered. From the perspective of political PR professionals the possibility to exchange unfiltered information is a particularly important advantage as it enables bloggers to bypass the gatekeeper function of traditional media. At the same time, many journalists keep an eye on the blogosphere, enabling important topics to make their way into mainstream mass media via niche blogs (Zerfass and Sandhu, 2006, in Nessmann, 2009: 355).

From the perspective of personality PR the disadvantages of blogs are mosty associated with time and effort. In order to stay topical and to ensure loyal users, news and opinions should be updated regularly, at least once in a weeks. Imago-makers argue that for the best possible outcome for the blogger, who uses it for image and reputation building, the comments from guests and "visitors" have to be continuously monitored so that if needed, the rapid answer and reaction to the negative comments can be used. Constant updating is not normally feasible for celebrities, who have tight schedules, so they can not always update the blog when needed, even though blogs come from authentic statements and comments. While creating "personality" via the internet, it is

important to consider that the "real personality" should be consistent with the "online personality" and the (virtual) statements made in a blog should fit in with actions in the real world. The aim being to create a coherent, credible image of the person concerned (Nessmann, 2009: 355).

2.3 Legitimacy and deliberative democracy

Legitimacy is a basic category of political communication in democratic societies. Meyer explains that legitimacy consist of an empirical component (public trust and support) and a normative component (justifiableness according to norms, values and traditions) (Meyer 1999:619). Therefore, legitimacy both determines and is simultaneously a result of democratic political communication.

Scharpt suggests the concepts of input and output dimension of democratic legitimation (Scharpt, 1998).

Witte et al (2009) and Meyer (1999) summarize Scharpt's concepts by explaining that the democratic input or "government by the people"- dimension consists of three main parts: (1) the authorization of power holders, (2) responsiveness in the exercise of power and (3) the accountability of power holders (Witte et al, 2009: 5; Meyer 1999: 619). In the *output* dimension, "*government for the people*" implies according to Scharpf that "collectively binding decisions should serve the common interest of the constituency". The democratic output embraces the idea of "the *government for the people* which implies that collectivity binding decisions should serve the common interest of the constituency" (Scharpf, 1998).

In the input dimension, "government by the people" implies that collectively binding decisions should originate from the authentic expression of the preferences of the constituency in question. The government, in other words, is meant to be *self*-government, and compliance can be

expected because the laws are self-determined, rather than imposed by an exogenous will. In the *output* dimension, "government *for the people*" implies that collectively binding decisions should serve the common interest of the constituency. Obedience is justified because collective fate control is increased when the powers of government can be employed to deal with those problems that the members of the collectivity cannot solve either individually, or through market interactions, or through voluntary cooperation (Ibid).

Trust in the government has dropped deeply in Estonia during a years time. In summer 2009, only 38% of citizens trusted the government in Estonia, even though it is still higher than the EU27 average trust in national governments (32%) (Eurobaromer 2009 : 4). This supports the conclusion that the legitimization of Estonian political parties is eroding. One reason here could be also that in the society in which the democratic values could develop started only 20 years ago (Vihalemm et al., 1997). The current situation where citizens have lost the trust to the government could found parallels with what could be called "crisis of representation" (Hayward, 1995). One of the reasons here could be that citizens in the young democracy are not used and do not feel that they can to participate in decision making process on the grass root level (Vihalemm *et al.,* 1997). On the other hand, mass media could be accused, as it has not fulfilled its functions to educate the public and provide a platform for 'public political discourse' (McNair, 2003) in Estonia.

Jürgen Habermas has explained the concept of a public sphere where all citizens can publicly discuss public concerns with rational arguments. According to him at the end of the discussion a reasonable public opinion evolves that constitutes the basis for all political decisions (Habermas 1989; 2006). For political communication in democracies it is of great importance that it is the public sphere which curries public opinion. According to Witte *et al.* in a mass democracy the direct political influence of the citizens is rather limited and the public sphere fulfils the function of an intermediary system that mediates between citizens and political actors and offers a platform where citizens and political actors can discuss (Witte *et al* 2009: 6). In the mass media driven

society the public sphere can exist mainly via and within mass media, but at the same time, the mass media have turned the public sphere into a "mass media public sphere" (Ibid) or *mediatizaised* public sphere (Hjarvard 2008). It means that "the puglic sphere would be dominanted by well organized collective actors (interest groups and political parties), not by the citizens themselves (Witte *et al* 2009: 6). In other words, from Habermas' theory it could be concluded that the mediating function of the public sphere between citizens and the political decision-system would display a limited one-sided direction, as the public sphere would be a public sphere produced but the political system itself (Witte *et al* 2009: 6). In this case the mass media has failed to support the formation of *habermasian* public sphere.

Emerging Web 2.0 applications offers citizens both the platform for public debate and channel for interactive information exchange.

In recent years mass communication increasingly has moved into pre-medial areas such as weblogs or social online communities (Witte *at al*: 20). That way the question about how this phenomena might effect the democracy has risen. According to Witte the so called cyber-optimists suggest re-democratisation of the public sphere. According to optimistic approach the internet has positive effect on engagement and it helps participation of those groups in the society who otherwise are not engaged offline (Boulianne 2009). According to this approach the web technology helps ti strengthen political participation and allows the direct communication between political actors and the citizens without the mediation role of the mass media.

On the contrary, some studies demonstrate empirical evidence that the Internet does often not involve those groups which have been not involved so far, because the "Knowledge gap" of those individuals will even increase with the web. As Witte et al puts it, according to cyber pessimists "Digital Divide" is added to a "Democratic Divide" (Witte *et al* 2009: 6).

Another problem academics bring out is the fragmentation. With the Internet and Web 2.0 applications a "multimedia, multi-channel communication society" evolves (Kamps 2002, cited in Witte et al, 2009:7) and as a result the public sphere will be fragmented into part-publics (Habermas, 2006).

Dahlberg states that the web offers opportunity to "pull" information from diverse sources and get various viewpoints so that the public sphere could expand (Dahlberg, 2007). Sunstein, on the contrary, argues that people discuss political issues in rather homogenous groups *with "likeminded others"* and, therefore, avoid different viewpoints (Sunstein, 2001).

Habermas argues that in virtual society the public sphere do not exist yet:

" For now, the functional equivalents for the structures of the public sphere are missing in the virtual environments that re-callect the decentralized messages, select them, and synthesize thme in a revised version" (Habermas in Witte *et al* 2009: 8, translation by Witte).

2.4 Estonian Electoral System in the context of EP elections

In Estonia the proportional representation with closed party list system is used and six members of the European Parliament were elected.

The President of the Republic calls the elections at least three months before the election day. Election results are determined based on the principle of proportionality. Mandates are distributed using the d'Hondt distribution method with the distribution series 1,2,3,4 etc. Candidates can be nominated as candidate lists of political parties or as independent candidates.

For EP elections parties were campaigning nationally. The whole country formed a single constituency. For Estonian general elections parties campaign regionally in diverse electoral districts (2007 Parliament of Estonia elections there where 12 districts).

For the EP elections in 2009 each political party had to prepare a list of candidates, including up to 12 candidates.

The legal basis for the elections to the European Parliament is established by the European Parliament Election Act, passed on 18 December 2002 and entered into force on 23 January 2003. Amended: 18 December 2003, 21 January 2004, 9 March 2004, 14 April 2004, 22 September 2004, 29 September 2004, 9 June 2005, 7 June 2006, 16 November 2006.

Voters may also vote in advance. Advance polls shall be held from the thirteenth day to the ninth day before election day in a polling division designated by a county electoral committee; from the sixth day to the fourth day before election day in all polling divisions and electronically. Postal voting is an option for voters permanently residing in a foreign state and voters temporarily staying in a foreign state. If a voter wishes to vote by post, he or she should send a corresponding application to the Estonian representation in the country of their residence. The ballot papers sent by post must be received by a representation not later than by the date determined by the representation so that the National Electoral Committee could receive the ballot papers not later than on the fourth day before election day.

Voters are included automatically into the Electoral Roll, on the basis of the Population Register.

The period of active election campaigning starts on the day when presentation of candidates for registration ends, that is forty-fifth day before election day (28 April 2009). Active election campaigning on an election day is prohibited.

Home voting is also held.

In addition to traditional voting procedure it is also possible to vote electronically. Electronic voting is possible from the 10th to the 4th day before the election day. Electronic voting begins on 28 May at 9 a.m. and lasts round the clock until the end of voting on 3 June at 8 p.m.

The counting of votes begins after the end of the voting. The results of voting should not be disclosed before the end of voting of all member states of the European Union.

Voting is not compulsory in Estonia. The right to vote includes every Estonian citizen who is 18 years of age by the day of the elections with the exemption of those who have been divested of his or her legal competence by a court. The right to vote during EP elections includes also every European Union citizen who is 18 years of age by the day of the elections, who has right to vote in his or her home Member State and who's permanent residence is in Estonia, i.e. the address details of his or her residence have been entered in the Estonian population register

The nomination of candidates for registration began on the 60th day before the election day (8 April 2009). Presentation of candidates for registration ended at 6 p.m. on the forty-fifth day before election day (23 April 2009).

A political party or independent candidate had to transfer an amount of five times the minimum monthly wage (21 750 EEK = 1390 EUR) per each person presented for registration to the account of the National Electoral Committee as security before the presentation of candidates for registration.

The National Electoral Committee registered the candidates submitted for registration as required not later than on the 40th day before the election day (not later than 28 April 2009).

The right to be elected includes every Estonian and European Union citizen with the right to vote and who is 21 years of age. Regular Members of the Defence Forces have no right to stand as candidates in elections to the European Parliament.

The exact date of the European parliamentary elections was 7 June 2009, from 9am until 8 pm. (Elections to the European Parliament are held on a date falling within the period determined by the Council of the European Union.)

According to the Estonian electoral law (Riigikogu Election Act, passed on 12.06.2002) the regular parliament (Riigikogu) elections shall be held on the first Sunday of March of the fourth year following the preceding Riigikogu election year. According to this law, also extraordinary elections shall be held on a Sunday. Sunday has been chosen as a work-free day so that it would be easier to more voters to participate the elections. At the moment there is a debate going on whether any other day of the week could be used, as more and more voters tend to vote before the Election Day or electronically.

In theory a candidate represents a political party and its ideology. It means his or her campaign should be considerate more party-centred and not person-centred. In practice, most parties put stress on their leader's image and personality rather than the ideology of the party.

The system used to fund political parties in Estonia is often described as "not transparent enough". In general parties get financial subsidies from the state, one important funding source is membership payment. Both domestic and foreign donations are allowed. There is a debate going on in Estonia where it has been pointed out that stricter laws are needed. There is no fixed ceiling for campaign expenses in Estonia. The election campaigns of political parties are financed by themselves. Money for campaigns comes from: membership fees, donations from private persons, income from party property, loans and allocations from the state budget (based on the Riigikogu election results). Anonymous donations from legal entities are not permitted. A political party and an independent candidate shall, within one month after election day, submit a report to the National Electoral Committee concerning expenses incurred and sources of funds used for the conduct of the election campaign.

(Source: Estonian National Electoral Committee, www.vvk.ee)

2.3.1 Estonia as young e-society

From the perspective of the interactivity opportunities Web 2.0 offers for the citizens Estonia is a particularly interesting case to study for two reasons: First, the Estonian info technology and telecoms market is one of the most developed in Eastern Europe. The country has relatively high Internet usage, including Internet banking and e-government services as well as relatively high broadband penetration.

During elections of European Parliament 14.7% of the electorate voted via the Internet in Estonia.

According to different estimates approximately 70% of the population uses the Internet. International Telecommunication Union (ITU) estimates that 68% of the population uses internet in Estonia. According to the data from Estonian social and market research company SAAR POLL 75% among 15-74 year old Estonians use internet or e-mail in December 2008 (SAAR POLL, 2008: 2).

Estonia was the first nation in the world that allowed voting via the Internet during its elections for the Parliament (Riigikogu) in 4 March 2007. The system was tested first in the limited local elections in October 2005, when almost 10 000 people voted via the Internet. In 2007 3,4 % of Estonians voted via the internet. In June 2009 the Internet voters Turnout was 6,5% and during the Local elections in the autumn of 2009 already 9,5% of the voters gave their voice electronically via the Internet (Source: Estonian National Electoral Committee, http://www.vvk.ee/index.php?id=11178)

Estonia only regained its independence form the Soviet Union in the beginning of 1990's and therefore should be still considered a developing democracy. Studies show that in spite of the high internet usage and well developed Info Technology systems not that many people in Estonia use Internet in order to participate in political decision making process. The research curried out by

sodial and market research company SAAR POLL shows that only 6% of the respondents have ever used internet for expressing the opinion or participating in a discussion (SAAR POLL, 2008: 16).

3. METHODOLOGY AND RESEACH QUESTIONS

Considering the latest low engagement to politics, decrease of trust to government activities in Estonia and the fragmentation debate the following research questions arise:

- Which Web 2.0 applications are offered on the websites of the parties?

- To what extent were these features used by website visitors?

- Does the on-line communication of Estonian political parties offer application that might contribute to a development towards a deliberative democracy?

The article contributes to the Comparative European New Media and Elections Project (CENMEP), which studies how Web 2.0 applications and social media are used in current electoral campaigns in diverse EU countries.

For this study two types of web features are distinguished.

(1) The traditional Web 1.0 features offer information on the websites either as HTML or pdf files and are mostly used for consultation by visitors. There are also features that are considered traditional but offer at the same time asynchronous communication with party members such as e-mail and web forums.

(2) The Web 2.0 features, understood in this study as all web features that allow people to people interaction on the websites and to contribute to these websites (cf. http://www.oreillynet.com/lpt/a/6228), such as popular Web 2.0 features like YouTube, blogging,

blog rolling, and social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Hyves). The concepts of social networking, interactivity, and user-generated content are central to Web 2.0.

The objective was also to investigate the extent to which visitors use the web features' interactivity. Even if the research project does not involve audience research, to some extent the use of web features can be monitored. For instance, bloggers may allow visitors to comment on their posts or value the blog entry with a five star rating. If politicians allow these comments as well, to what extent do visitors engage in these discussions, and how? To what extent do visitors use discussion forums on websites and/or how many visitors view the (embedded) video's or pictures on the websites?

In order to draw conclusions on the personalisation of the e-campaigns it was analysed whether candidates had blogs, and how these where used, whether they were active in video and photo shanring networks and whether the CVs of the candidates where presented in formal or personal style. Here such information like favourite food, sports, film and music was considered.

From the perspective of the Web 2.0 the interactivity is the most important variable considered in this study.

In the case of Estonian the Euroepan Parliament candiates web- pages did not involv options such as web-forums, live chat and other forms of direct discussion, therefore these Web 2.0 applications are not taken into consideration in this study.

The use of entertainment, as a feature which shows the candidate as a "fun loving" people, which allows identification with common people, was also mapped (the games), but also the use of music, video, gossip etc.)

The analyses consist of a quantitative examination of the candidates and parties web sites on the day of the European Parliament election sin June 2009.

The article contributes to the Comparative European New Media and Elections Project (CENMEP), which studies how Web 2.0 applications and social media are used in current electoral campaigns in diverse EU countries.

The categories for the analyses were worked out on the basis of the Web 2.0 principles of openness, personalisation, interactivity, participation and multimediality, as well as the possibilities of information and PR management.

The population of websites consisted of the following:

- Political party websites

- Political party campaign websites

- Candidate websites

- Only candidate pages identifiable through party pages.

The sampling procedure for Estonia, where EU elections were organised nationally, the sampling procedure was as follows:

- All party (campaign) websites

- Top 5 candidates from all political parties

- A random systematic sample of candidates.

All coded websites were archived using local and central archiving system.

8 (out of 11) party, 2 campaign page on the political party website, 28 candidates websites and 27 candidate's web pages on political party website were chosen.

Question: Of what type is the website?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Website of political party	8	12,1	12,3	12,3
	campaign page on the political party website	2	3,0	3,1	15,4
	Candidate´s website	28	42,4	43,1	58,5
	Candidate's webpage on political party website	27	40,9	41,5	100,0
	Total	65	98,5	100,0	
Missing	System	1	1,5		
Total		66	100,0		

There are also planned to conduct interviews with parties representative responsible for the Internet page. That way the it would be possible to map the web- strategies and understand better how important the party campaign manager consider the opportunities offered by Web 2.0 applications.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Web 2.0 applications

Social networks

In the context of deliberative democracy the participation elements are of great importance. Possibilities what party or politician creates in order to start and to remain in dialogue and discussion with people. Web 2.0 offers possibilities for political actors to involve citizens in the

public debate and decision making via the social networks. Estonian case shows that these opportunities are offered to citizens in a very limited fashion.

The analyses show that there was no website which promoted it's items to any social news website and only 9 web sites (14%) had links to social network sites.
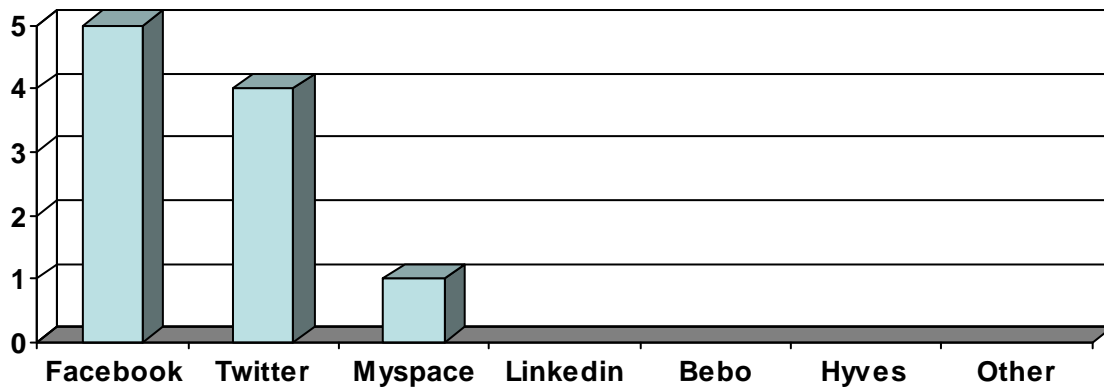

Figure 1. Websites links to social networks

Political party which had links to 3 social network site (Facebook; Twitter, Myspace) was Social Democratic Party. Interestingly, also 4 candidates with link to social network (3 Facebook; 1 Twitter) represented all the same party.

Blog

From the perspective of public relations and favorable image making strategies offers blog to political leaders excellent new means for presenting themselves just as they or their consultants want them to be seen. Through blog it is also easy to increase the level of familiarity with the web site visitor. At the same time, the message to the potential voter is presented directly without mediation of the journalist or any other "gatekeeper" (Nessmann 2009). But the PR specialist often tend to forget the much broader meaning of blog. With this means political leader can really built up interpersonal relation with the citizen and create a platform for dialogue. In that sense a blog, as also a social networking web page, can contribute to the process of creating the public sphere where

citizens can publicly discuss public concerns and participate in the decision making process (Habermas, 2006).

Question: Does the party / candidate's website have a blog?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes, on the same website	20	30,3	30,8	30,8
	no	45	68,2	69,2	100,0
	Total	65	98,5	100,0	
Missing	System	1	1,5		
Total		66	100,0		

Analyses of Estonian political parties show that during the EP elections in June 2009 only 30% of the candidates had a blog. Visitors could rate only 2 blogs out of 20, which indicates that the feedback form the reader is not welcome and dialogue between the politician and citizen not possible in most cases. Only one blog showed visitors statistics. Only 3 blogs out of 20 had tags added to the blog entries, which makes it difficult for the visitors to find topics of their interest. Visitors are allowed to add tag only on one analysed webpage.

It could be concluded that Web 2.0 applications such as social networks and blogs are not widely used by Estonian candidates and they do not offer to the visitors the interactivity. The interactivity or participation has only been developed in a limited fashion. The participatory elements are extremely important to consider, because it reflects in how far the party or politician is willing to establish contact with the citizen (Witte *et al* 2009:12).

Information management

Web 2.0 applications make entire Internet more user-friendly. The current research has also analysed how a political leader or party disperses information about itself. The current study shows that web feeds where used on 18 pages out of 65. In most cases the website offers news as a web feed. This application offers many possibilities for providing users with up-to-date information if they register to the feed. In Estonian case this feature is poorly used.

Videos

For politicians, video plays important role in the internet election campaign, as it is one of the best ways to communicate the message to the potential voters. It is also an excellent opportunity for personal PR management.

Anyhow, the results of this research show that the use of videos in Estonian political web pages is rather limited as only 18 out of 65 or 27 % of the web pages had video content.

Question: Does the website contain video's?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	18	27,3	27,7	27,7
	no	47	71,2	72,3	100,0
	Total	65	98,5	100,0	
Missing	System	1	1,5		
Total		66	100,0		

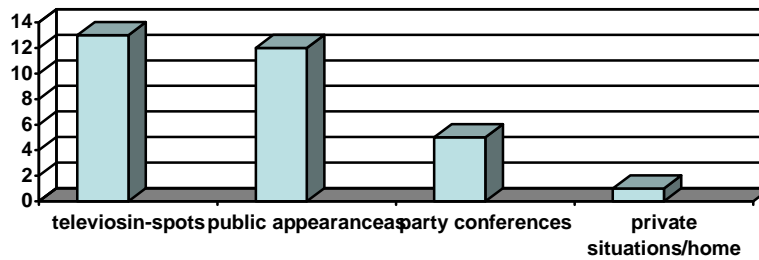Most common content was television-spot, which was used on 13 web pages.

Figure 2. Television spots used on political web pages

It was surprising that there were almost missing videos of private situations and home, as this would be one good way to create familiarity and so called *celebrity politician* who appears for the visitor in everyday situation. That would be good way to create identification.

What is concerning the personalisation, it is interesting to consider, that in candidates CV the favourite sport was mentioned in 7, favourite music in 2, favourite write in 2 and favourite TV program never.

5. CONCLUSIONS

As a general conclusion it could be argued, that in Estonia visitors of political web pages do not use that much interactive features. It is somehow surprising if to consider, that Estonia is a state where almost 70 % of the population uses actively the Internet, e-banking and several e-services offered by state. The reason here could be that people in developing democracy are not that prepared to use interactive applications in the internet and they lack the rational knowledge which citizens in old democracies have gained. It should be considered, that even if internet usage has increased in Estonia, people as citizens should know how to use the Web 2.0 possibilities in order to participate in the internet communication (Norris, 2001). Therefore, there is no that much evidence,

that Web 2.0 so far has increased the development of deliberative politics. Web 2.0 interactive features are poorly used both by the citizens and politicians.

Even if candidates have blogs and are present on social networking platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, they tends to be only for marketing purposes and not for making participation easier. It could also be argued that the personal input form on the side of the candidates to the Internet campaigning is low and most candidates do not offer that much interactivity via the websites.

Also the options Web 2.0 offers for personalized PR are used very modestly.

The Web 2.0 applications theoretically offer various opportunities for implementing a deliberative policy, as they could involve people to the debate and decision making. No attempts to facilitate the forming of new Public sphere for which 2.0 features offer perfect opportunities. So far such possibilities are only offered in a limited fashion. The empirical investigation of the European Parliament candidates' web pages during the 2009 elections demonstrates that the Web 2.0 is not sufficiently offered on the politicians' web sites. It means also, that in Estonia one cannot really speak of participation in political debates and decision making via the web.

The analyses demonstrate that further research and academic discussion is needed on how best to contribute to the reformation of existing *mediatizaised* public sphere so that it could fit into the ideas of the deliberative democracy.

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